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Displacement

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In the complex politics of Cularin, everyone in the system has an equal voice. Even those who live outside the law can have a hand in shaping it, such as the crime lord Nirama. Living aboard his well-armed luxury transport in Cularin's asteroid belt, the wily Oblee criminal has a "special" relationship with law enforcement in the system. His presence has a remarkably calming effect on the illegal elements of Cularin, as he is well known for his intolerance of foolish or destructive behavior. Because of this, the legal forces of the system ignore his activities as long as he remains a pacifying influence.

Unfortunately for Nirama, there are powers moving in Cularin with little regard for either his influence or the law, powers that seek only one goal -- his destruction.

"I am going to say it again."

"I really wish you wouldn't."

Tendin Vought, or Razor to his employers and targets, sighed and looked at his annoying companion. There are a thousand reasons why Razor preferred working alone and now, after meeting Caranna, he had a thousand and one. Sure, she was attractive, but she lacked the one trait of indoctrinated Twi'lek women he appreciated most -- she was talkative. Very, very talkative. If she ever remained silent for five minutes, Tendin suspected the lavender-tinted woman's jaw would lock up.

That delightful thought was shattered by Caranna's high-pitched voice. "I have a bad feeling about this."

He wished he could have left her out of this. But the stark reality of the mission they were facing required that he have an ally. Even with her horrifically shrill voice and constant rattling, Caranna was one of the deadliest professionals he knew. Frell, she was one of the best hunters this side of Coruscant, and as much as he hated to admit it, he would need her help if he accepted the job.

If he decided not to accept, taking her out before she reached her fighter was a thought that made him feel warm inside. Of course, he'd have to strike from behind, but that's what he was best at. Caranna might be a good shot, but she couldn't hit what she couldn't see.

His fantasy was interrupted again, this time by the hiss of an opening door. One of their hosts strode into the room, metal feet clicking on the

textured steel floor. A modulated voice echoed from the newcomer's reflective blue chassis. "Forgive the delay. We had to check our accounts before answering your question about the fee. We trust this number will satisfy your professional concerns."

Two smaller droids rolled over to them and handed each a small datapad. Razor noted the obscenely high figure with little more than a raised eyebrow, but his "partner" emitted a loud squeal of delight that made his hand instinctively twitch to his left-leg vibroblade.

"That is fantastic! You've got yourself a deal!"

The taller droid nodded its head, but held up one segmented hand. "We are quite pleased to hear it, but we require both of you to agree."

The Twi'lek woman sighed, but her long eyelashes batted in Razor's direction. "Oh come on, handsome. This is a frang of a good job. Challenging, rewarding, and we finally get a chance to work together!"

He ground his teeth, forcing his hand back onto the table. "Please stop shouting. I am only four feet away."

"My audio receptors are also quite acute, Lady Caranna. So acute, in fact, that I am certain I have not heard Master Vought's acquiescence to the mission. If it is a matter of funds, sir, I am authorized to increase the pay base by 20 percent and permit both of you to receive 2,000 credits to an account of your choice up front."

"Master Vought" nodded after a moment's thought, frowning afterward. "First, call me Razor."

"So noted, Sir Razor."

Razor let that pass, having seen how difficult it could be to convince a droid to address anyone just by their name. "Second, the increased pay is nice, but for this job, I'll need a few more items."

The droid, whose designation had not been revealed to either of them, inclined its head. "As you wish. Name your terms."

Caranna sighed again, moving over enough to lean close and let Razor smell her horrok lily perfume. "Nice one, Razzie. You're a hard negotiator. I like that." She patted the back of his hand, a gesture he pointedly did not return.

Instead, he kept talking to the droid. "To start with, I want that fighter you have in the docking bay, slot 12. Mine is almost shot, and if I'm going to be tackling a star liner, I'll need the guns and missile rack I saw on it."

The droid paused for a moment, flickering lights in its optic visor indicating a remote communication. "Agreed. Our prototype fighter could use a field test, though we will have to make a small modification to allow an organic pilot. That is being attended to now. Anything else?"

The blade-covered bounty hunter nodded. "A pair of vibro-axes and a legal permit in case we have to move through a customs zone or blockade on our way to the target."

Again the droid's lights blinked for a minute. "Agreed. They will be loaded into your new fighter, and the permits will be transmitted into its on-board computer while you are in flight. Anything else?"

Razor nodded. "One last item. I need a sealed suit of powered armor and a jetpack. That fighter doesn't look like it contains an ejection seat. If I can remain mobile in space, I can still make a try at the objective."

This time, the droid's sensor lights blazed for nearly five minutes. While they did, Razor couldn't help but return the stare Caranna had been giving him since he'd begun talking. He looked into her purple eyes, disturbed at how intensely she was studying him. "What?" he asked with unveiled hostility.

"Just impressed. You really know how to squeeze the most out of every contract. I admire that. I really do." She smiled. "You are... magnificent."

Even detesting the woman, he found her interest alluring. "Well, I suppose - "

Then her face fell into a frown. "That's why I'm sorry I had to poison you." Caranna's hand turned over, revealing the small triangular drug patch in her palm. "I just can't work with someone who wants to put a dagger in my back."

Razor's blades were in his hands a moment later, but even as he raised them to strike, his vision blurred. It became intensely hard to breathe, and then he lost all sense of balance and tumbled out of the chair. He looked up at Caranna, but everything he tried to say fell through his lips as an incoherent babble. The world went dark and everything passed into silence.

When the droid host's lights stopped flickering and its attention returned to the chamber, Caranna was kneeling next to Razor's crumpled form. She gazed up at it impassively as she stuffed his weapons and gear in her flight bag. "Razor and I accept your proposal, assuming that last term has been approved."

The droid tilted its head and spoke. "It has, but Sir Razor seems to be..
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"Dead? Oh no, just mind-numbed." She stripped off the transfer patch from her palm and placed it in a plasteel case at her waist. "Do whatever you like with him. He'll be fine in a few days. By then, I'll have your job done and pick up my half of the reward. Oh, I'll take the new fighter. He can have my old one when he wakes up."

The droid followed her out to the landing bay, while others carried the insensate bounty hunter to the infirmary. "Is it not highly illogical to leave Sir Razor functional? He will certainly come after you to seek revenge for your actions."

Caranna winked at the blue-plated facilitator as she slung up into the streamlined prototype fighter. "I certainly hope so. Should make life interesting." After a quick preflight to make sure the impressively rapid refit was working, she began to cycle her departure. "Is everything he asked for loaded onto this craft?"

The droid inclined its head several times. "Yes, Miss, including the armor and flight pack as requested. We can transfer your belongings to this starfighter if you wish to wait a moment."

Caranna lowered the canopy and continued speaking through an external port. "No, that's all right. He can have them. I think he'd look awfully cute in my dresses."

In response to her sudden fit of giggling, the droid simply stated, "Of course, Miss. I will be sure to relay that thought to him upon his recovery." It stepped away from the fighter as the sleek craft's engines began to glow. "We will transfer your half of the mission funds upon completion. Good fortune to you."

Caranna nodded and cut all communications as she angled the fighter out of the landing bay and bolted off into the void. Once she was away, the droid returned to the interior of the manufacturing complex. It did not understand organic behavior on occasion, and this certainly qualified as one of those times...